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301454Z Dec 04

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 LAGOS 002592

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STATE FOR INR, AF/W, DRL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/28/2014

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: SOUTHERN NIGERIA: POLITICAL TIDBITS

REF: ABUJA 1965 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Consul General Brian L. Browne per 1.4 b and d

11. (S/NF) Summary: During an early December visit, Abia State Governor Orji Kalu told Consul General his presidential bid is tactical. Kalu admitted he was serving as Vice President Atiku's stalking horse to distract President Obasanjo, with the understanding that Kalu will emerge as Atiku's running mate. Kalu intimated that he had participated in discussions with other People's Democratic Party (PDP) members, including VP Atiku, about fomenting civil unrest to remove Obasanjo from office prior to 2007. The Consul General advised Kalu that attempting to engineer either a coup or civil unrest would be an extreme misstep that could do irreparable damage to Nigeria and its democratic maturation.

12. (S) Summary continued: Prominent human rights attorneys told the Consul General that progressive forces in southern Nigeria are attempting to coalesce to counter the PDP. The All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA) announced that Chairman Chekwas Okorie was being removed from his position for anti-party activities. The APGA rift has been caused by lack of money and interference by the PDP. Senator Musiliu Obanikoro left the Alliance for Democracy to join the PDP. The move is a major blow to Lagos State Governor Tinubu. Obanikoro was a member of Tinubu's inner circle. End summary.

KALU ADMITS HIS PRESIDENTIAL BID IS TACTICAL, WARNS OF CIVIL UNREST

13. (C) Abia State Governor Orji Kalu confided to Consul General that his presidential bid was basically a ruse. With his highly publicized bid, Kalu hoped to distract Obasanjo's ire from VP Atiku and also to undermine Obasanjo's attempts to push River State Governor Peter Odili as a candidate. (Although from Rivers, Odili is of Igbo extraction. Obasanjo hopes he can placate both the South-South and Southeast if Odili is either his hand-picked presidential or vice-presidential candidate.) In exchange for running interference, Kalu said he hoped to be selected as VP Atiku's running mate. Kalu claimed that VP Atiku retained as firm control of the party machinery as he did during the 2003 PDP convention when Atiku was the decisive figure in swinging the convention toward renominating Obasanjo. If we can get to the party convention, Atiku is a certain winner, the ebullient Kalu predicted.

14. (S/NF) Kalu and others in the People's Democratic Party (PDP) believe Obasanjo has lost touch with political reality and is steering Nigeria toward collapse. Kalu feared the country might not make it to the 2007 elections. Moreover, Obasanjo is still contemplating amending the constitution to allow himself a third term, Kalu opined. If Obasanjo continues his current bad performance or actually seeks a third term, Kalu warned he and other PDP members, including Atiku, would take extra-legal action to remove him from office; they would go as far as to foment civil unrest, Kalu suggested.

15. (S/NF) The Consul General plainly told Kalu that attempting to orchestrate a coup or civil unrest was the acme of shortsightedness. Once such forces are unleashed you can no longer master them, the CG warned. The "solution" that emerges could be more dire than the problem you attempted to solve. Taking such a gamble would injure Nigeria domestically and internationally. Moreover, history would rue such a decision and would blame him for it. If you honestly believed you controlled the PDP, the best tack would be to adhere to the rule of law and the democratic electoral process, the CG offered. If Atiku believed he had the inside track to the presidency in 2007, the last thing he would want is Obasanjo to fail to make it to 2007. Instead of encouraging extra-legal activity, Atiku, and by extension, Kalu, should be dousing such talk, explained the CG. Their efforts should be focused on advocating essential political

and economic reform so that Nigeria can be in the best shape possible come 2007. If you believe victory is within reach, you should want Nigeria to be on the mend. You should safeguard not endanger the thing for which you claim to be fighting, the CG concluded.

16. (S/NF) Comment: It is no surprise Kalu and Atiku are working together. However, Kalu's talk about civil unrest shows the depth of anti-Obasanjo feeling held by some members of the president's own party. Kalu has exaggerated more than once in his life and his statement about extra-legal activity could be in this genre. Nevertheless, we clearly signaled that such escapades would win no succor from our corner and that the electoral game was the only game in town as far as we were concerned. End Comment.

PROGRESSIVES ARE UNITING TO COUNTER PDP IN THE SOUTH

17. (C) Prominent human rights attorney Femi Falana, an unsuccessful 2003 Ekiti State gubernatorial candidate, told the Consul General that he and others from the pre-1999 human rights/democracy movement are working to broker a closer relationship among progressive forces in southern Nigeria. Focusing on the Alliance for Democracy (AD) in the Southwest, the All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA) in the Southeast (the two regionally based parties), and a handful of even smaller parties, they are working to counter what they view as the PDP's attempt to monopolize the country. Lagos State Governor Tinubu is purportedly involved in the effort.

APGA TURMOIL

18. (C) Because of its own internal turmoil, APGA may not be able to contribute much to this inter-party dialogue. The week of December 13, members of the National Executive Committee of APGA announced Chairman Chekwes Okorie was being removed from his position for anti-party activities. Friction between Okorie and APGA's Anambra gubernatorial candidate Peter Obi seems to be a factor in the removal. (Note: Peter Obi was the putative winner of the 2003 Anambra gubernatorial election.)

19. (C) Okorie has been accused of taking money from the Atiku-Ngige axis in the PDP in exchange for withholding APGA support for Obi court case challenging the election results. (Chris Ngige is the current governor of Anambra.) Meanwhile, Obi and Ngige nemesis Chris Uba have apparently had some negotiations aimed at reaching an agreement that would put Obi in power in Anambra and allow Uba to maintain some influence in the state. As both the APGA and the PDP experience internal dissension, competing factions in each party are working with different factions from the other party to destroy their internal enemies. Thus, the murky world of politics in Anambra gets even more sullied.

SENATOR OBANIKORO MOVES FROM AD TO PDP

110. (C) Senator Musiliu Obanikoro left the AD to join the PDP. The move is a major blow to Lagos State Governor Tinubu, the only AD governor in the country. Obanikoro reportedly was a member of Tinubu's inner circle, and one of the people being considered to succeed Tinubu. Obanikoro can expose many of Tinubu's political secrets and strategies, including plans to maintain AD power in Lagos and to control Afenifere. Obanikoro may have valuable information on Tinubu's close relationship with Vice President Atiku and their plans to prepare for a possible Atiku-Tinubu ticket in the 2007 presidential elections. Obanikoro's move is further indication of the PDP's resolve to wrest Lagos from Tinubu and the AD in 2007.

111. (U) This cable was cleared by Embassy Abuja.
BROWNE